THE LIFE of SAINT SPIRIDON

Wonder-worker and Bishop of Tremithus

Translated and adapted, with additional information added, by

Mother Cassiana

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INTRODUCTION

How does one 'introduce' the life of any saint?

There is no better introduction than the hymns and prayers which the Church addresses to that particular individual who has 'found favor with God.' Through prayer, we draw near to God, His most pure Mother, and all the saints, in an intimate communion. It is not enough to know about *the saints; we must come to actually* know *them.*

In the Vespers and Matins services for Saint Spiridon on December 12, we find references to his gentle character, his humble beginnings, and a number of miracles which he worked. The Akathist Hymn to this saint further elaborates on these points; however, all these prayers assume that the faithful reading and hearing them already are familiar with the life and activities of this popular and beloved bishop of the early Church.

Who was this bishop, mentioned in every Litia service together with Saint Nicholas? Where did he come from? Why is he so important and eminent among other bishop saints? What did he do in his life that was so extraordinary? Why is he called a 'miracle worker'?

Since Saint Spiridon did not leave written treatises on the faith, or even letters which might have spoken of his life, deeds and teachings, the answers to these questions must come from other sources.

The life of the saint is examined fully in the Church's ancient and lengthy hagiographical accounts. The following pages are based on a personal translation made from the Romanian Cyrillic version of **"Vietiile Sfintilor" (Lives of the Saints)** *for the month of December, published in 1811 at Neamt Monastery, Romania.*

It was originally intended to be just that, a translation of the text; however, in the course of translating, it was obvious that the elaborate, flowery style which the anonymous hagiographer used would need some adapting in order to present a more readable form, better suited to the English reader of today. Nothing has been omitted from the Cyrillic text; quite the contrary, for paragraphs and pages have been added to provide relevant background information and explanations in the hope of clarifying text and points of Orthodox belief.

Sources consulted for some of the additional information include the Akathist Hymn to Saint Spiridon, the brief account of his life found in **Proloagele: Volum I** *published in Craiova, Romania 1991, as well as the services and synaxar for the feast day of the saint. Anyone writing of persons or events from the first three and a half centuries of the Church is, as always, indebted to Eusebius'* **History of the Church** *which is noted in several places in this brief account.*

A special note of thanks is extended to Reverend Mother Abbess Nazaria of Varatic Monastery, Romania, for again extending her hospitality to me at the monastery and thus providing me with the atmosphere and possibility to translate and write this small booklet.

Mother Cassiana
Great Lent, 1993

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Saint Spiridon has remained one of the most beloved saints in the Orthodox Church throughout the centuries. Clergy and laity alike can identify with this holy bishop. He was compassionate, but firm and loving; a humble shepherd, bishop, confessor of the faith during times of persecution, and an outstanding teacher of Orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea. He did not allow his episcopal rank to distance him from the faithful of his diocese, but was truly united with the people, loving them as a true father. He worked many miracles both during his life on earth and after his repose, even to the present day.

This holy father was born on the island of Cyprus. No date for his birth is given in the hagiographical account of his life, however, considering that he was already a bishop at the time of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 a.d.,it can rather safely be assumed that he was born in the latter half of the third century.

His parents were simple people, and raised their son in a humble and pious home where love for God abound. In his youth, Spiridon was a shepherd, watching over the flocks. Later, even as a bishop, he continued to keep sheep. He was not an ambitious youth, anxious for a position in society; instead he was content in the quiet country life of

work and prayer. The hymns sung on his feast day liken him to a number of Old Testament figures, saying that he was gentle like the prophet David who had also been a shepherd in his youth; like the patriarch Jacob, he too was humble of heart; like the great Abraham, he showed hospitality to all; he had the innocence of Job and the goodness of Moses.

Spiridon married at the legal age; again, however, the lengthy account of his life in the ancient Church writings are silent as to the name of his wife. They had several children, one of whom, a daughter named Irene, would later figure in a miracle worked by this saint. As a husband and father, Spiridon continued to live an honest life pleasing to God.

Some accounts state that Spiridon's wife died while rather young, others make no mention of her at all, and still others name Saint Spiridon as one of those early bishops of the Church who was, indeed, still married during the time of his episcopacy.

The canon in the Orthodox Church of bishops being chosen exclusively from the monastic or celibate clergy has been in effect for many centuries ,however the earliest years of Christianity did see a number of married men elected to the episcopacy. This rule of candidates for the episcopacy being chosen from among the celibate, monastic or widowed clergy was not strictly enforced or considered the norm until after the time of Spiridon's life. In fact, earliest mention enforcing celibate bishops is not found until some two hundred years later! In his *History of the Church,* the early historian Eusebius, a contemporary of St. Spiridon's, mentions at least two bishops specifically as being married during their episcopacy: Chaeremon, from the mid third century, "the very aged bishop of Nilopolis, fled with his wife to the mountain region of Arabia" during the persecution of Decius; and Demetrian, bishop of Antioch from 251-253. It must be remembered that the Church only began to feel the effects of monasticism in the fourth century. It was this influence, along with other practical considerations, which led the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to develop the requirement that bishops be chosen from among the monastic, or at the very least, celibate, ranks.

Why, then, do various sources seem to be at variance with each other regarding Saint Spiridon's marital status? This could possibly

be understood if we take into consideration the audiences for which these accounts were written. For the past several centuries, the faithful, both educated and unlearned, have known that bishops must be celibate. Church writers were aware that their readers (or listeners, since many of these accounts were written to be read aloud in church) were simple folk, pious, but uneducated in the development of the rules and canons to which the Church adheres today. Such people would have been scandalized to hear that a bishop, saint or otherwise, would be married! To avoid such an attitude, many hagiographers chose to either gloss over certain facts, or to rearrange them to suit the populace.

Was Saint Spiridon a married bishop, or had his wife been taken to the Lord while young in life? There are arguments on both sides. What is important is that we do have rules and canons today regarding the present and future election of the hierarchy. These must be respected, having been developed both through the experience and suffering of the Church, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the instance at hand, what concerns us is not how long Saint Spiridon's wife lived, but rather the holy life which the saint himself led, together with his deeds and teachings.

While living the quiet life of a shepherd, the saint developed the practice of offering help to anyone in need. He used his own limited finances to give rest to travellers and food to the hungry, in obedience to the Gospel command and the true spirit of Christianity. It was during this time, while he was living an obscure life in a remote region, serving God and his neighbor, that we begin to hear of miracles being worked through him.

Our Lord said that no one lights a lamp and places it under the table; no, the light must shine for all to see. Spiridon's humility, piety, love for God, and compassion for others would be an example for thousands throughout the centuries to follow, but first, this holy man had to be known beyond the limited bounds of the island of Cyprus. Attention was brought to his God-pleasing way of life through the miracles which were attributed to him.

A miracle is an action of God. In our earthly, limited, human reasoning, the curing of the fatally ill, the changing of a substance into something totally different, the submission of wild beasts, or the

mastery of the elements are all termed as "miracles." But all of these actions are natural to God, the Creator, who gives life to all, who "spoke and it was created," who walked upon the waters. God often works these deeds through the humble saints who are pleasing to Him and in whom He dwells. They, in their piety, do not attribute these actions to themselves, rather, they regard these miracles as exactly what they are: the works of God. Saint Spiridon proved to be such a vessel for God's works, for he lived in accordance with the words of Saint Paul, "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Jesus Christ who lives in me." *(Gal. 2:20).*

The early miracles worked through this saint include the healing of many who were incurably ill and, by his word alone, driving demons out of those who were possessed. God is not the god of sickness or suffering, nor can any evil spirit endure His presence. It was enough for just the shadow of Saint Peter the Apostle to fall upon the sick man to heal him. Surely the presence of God in Saint Spiridon, who had given himself totally to the Creator and Savior, could work the deeds of healing and driving off demons.

As these deeds and the holiness of his life became known, Spiridon was called to serve the Church in the ranks of the episcopacy. He was consecrated as Bishop of Tremithus near Salamis during the early fourth century. The qualities which had made him a loving and compassionate pastor of sheep were the same virtues which made him a worthy shepherd of the flock of Christ: he vigilantly watched over the clergy and faithful, feeding them through his preaching, leading and guiding them to the green pastures of the faith, driving off the heretical Arius who threatened to devour the flock like a wolf, and constantly seeking out those who had strayed. The wonders worked through this holy man continued and multiplied after his ascent to the hierarchal throne, for although now burdened with administrative duties, his love for God and devotion to prayer continued to burn within him.

Saint Spiridon Prays During Time of Drought

During the early years of his episcopacy, a terrible drought engulfed the island of Cyprus. Crops were threatened with complete ruin, plants withered, famine and death were close at hand. The people

knew that only someone whose prayers were as powerful as those of Elijah could move God to open the heavens and loose their storehouse of life-giving rain. Saint Spiridon proved to be the one needed. He saw the disaster threatening the people and was moved to mercy at the sight of their hunger. He prayed to the all gracious Lord; at once, the skies filled with clouds from the ends of the earth. No one could say that this was a natural occurrence, for the clouds strangely held their position for a prolonged time without releasing a drop of water. The saint again prayed fervently. Then, and only then, did the rains pour down upon the earth. The rain continued for many days until the saint again prayed and the skies cleared.

The land had been watered in abundance, plants emerged from the soil and bore fruit. After the drought there was enough food to feed the people, through the prayers of Saint Spiridon.

The Greedy Wheat Vendor

A few years later, famine again threatened the region. The wheat vendors, who had stockpiled grain throughout the years saw the impending disaster as an opportunity to grow rich. They opened their granaries, selling their wheat at high prices.

In the city of Tremithus there was one particular vendor who was extremely greedy. He purchased wheat from other regions at a low price, shipped the grain to Tremithus and then refused to sell it at a reasonable sum. Instead, he stored all of it in his granaries until the famine grew worse and the other vendors' granaries were emptied. Then, he offered his wheat for sale at exorbitant rates, seeing this as his opportunity to grow wealthy. The famine grew more severe daily, and the vendor's pockets continued to fill with money from the poor and starving.

One man, destitute, came to beg from the vendor, asking for a small amount of wheat so that he and his family would not die of hunger. The rich man was, by now, blinded by his ever growing greed and refused to show mercy to anyone. Instead of showing Christian love and mercy, he said to the poor man, "Go, bring me the money needed and you will get the amount of grain for the price."

The poor man, weak from hunger, and having no money to buy

even a grain of wheat, went to Saint Spiridon, weeping and revealing his poverty as he told the bishop about the unmerciful rich vendor. The saint said to him, "Don't weep. Go to your home, for the Holy Spirit says, 'in the morning your house shall be full of grain and you shall see that rich man begging from you, while you receive all the grain you need free of charge.' "

The poor man went away dejected for he thought the saint was just saying these things to comfort him.

That night, by the will of God, the skies again opened and torrential rain fell. The granaries of the greedy vendor burst open and the flood of rain swept the grain away, leaving it scattered widely where it could be easily gathered by those in need. The miserly man ran throughout the city, frantically asking everyone to help him gather up his grain so that he would not lose his source of wealth. The impoverished people, who had been on the brink of starvation because of his greed, saw the grain all along the roads and fields. Faithful as they were, they saw the hand of God clearly in this turn of events, for He fulfills the needs of those who love Him. Everyone turned out and gathered up the wheat, each filling his own house with all he needed.

Among those who gleaned the wheat from the roadside was the poor man who had asked for help the very day before. When the rich vendor saw him, he began to beg him to give him some of the grain which God had taken from him. The very words which the Holy Spirit had spoken through Saint Spiridon were fulfilled as God punished the vendor for his lack of mercy and comforted the poor man for his humility.

Gold from the Garden

A certain farmer had also gone to that same wheat vendor during the time of famine while the rich man's granaries were full. He asked to borrow enough wheat so that he would not starve, and promised to return that amount of grain and more at the time of harvest. The rich man refused to change his price for the grain, nor would his hardened heart be softened. He unmercifully closed the door upon the poor farmer and refused to hear the man's pleas. Instead, he said, "You will not get even one grain from me without paying first."

The poor farmer, on hearing this, went to Bishop Spiridon. He wept before the bishop, telling him of his impoverished state. He was not seeking financial help from the saint, only comfort, for it was well known that the Godly bishop lived the same modest life as the faithful of his diocese and certainly had no riches. Whatever he did have, he always gave to those in need, keeping for himself only what was necessary for life. Spiridon spoke to the farmer with encouraging words, then sent him home. The next day, however, the bishop went to see the poor man and, much to the farmer's surprise, gave him a wad of gold.

Where did the gold come from? We shall shortly see.

As he put the gold into the poor man's hands, Saint Spiridon said, "Go, brother, to the grain vendor and give him this gold as collatoral so that he will give you the grain which you need. When the harvest comes, you will reap enough; then you will go back to him, give him the amount of grain you received and he will return the gold to you. Then bring it back to me."

The poor man took the gold from the bishop's hand and hurried to the rich vendor. The vendor rejoiced at seeing the gold, since he loved money more than anything else, and he immediately loaned the grain to the poor man. When the famine passed and the harvest was completed, the farmer returned the promised amount of grain to the rich man, receiving back the gold. Then he gratefully hurried to Saint Spiridon.

The saint, taking the gold, called the farmer with him into his garden, saying, "Come with me, brother, and together we will give this back to the one who loaned it to us."

They went to a corner of the garden and the saint laid the gold near the fence. He raised his eyes and said, "Lord Jesus Christ, who do all things by your will alone, who long ago turned Moses' staff into a snake before the eyes of pharaoh, so also, just as you turned a snake from this very spot into this gold, order that it may now return to its former state; then your servant will know what great care you have for us and understand what is written in holy Scripture: 'God does whatsoever he wills.' "

The saint having thus prayed, the gold immediately turned into a snake and began to slither away. The snake, which had been turned to

gold at the prayers of the saint to save the humble man from death, now returned to its original state as it was created by God. When the farmer saw this miracle, he shook with fear and fell to the ground, saying, "I am not worthy of such a wondrous deed."

God's miracles are worked not only through the humble, but also for those who are humble in heart for their salvation. Saint Spiridon had no desire to keep the gold for he was known as one who had no wish to acquire earthly riches. Truly, through this miracle, the poor farmer beheld how strong the power of prayer is and how dearly God cares for those who love Him.

Saint Spiridon Delivers One Condemned to Death

A friend of Saint Spiridon's was falsely accused by certain men before the judge of the city. He was sent to prison, condemned to death, although he was innocent of any crime. Saint Spiridon, on hearing of this, could not tolerate the injustice, and set out to defend his friend from the unjust death sentence. The judge and the prison were some distance away, requiring the saint to travel through the countryside in order to appeal to the judge and set his friend free. It was during the rainy season and one of the rivers along the saint's path had crested its banks and was unpassable; but Saint Spiridon, remembering Joshua, son of Nun, who carried the Ark of the law and crossed the Jordan as on dry land even though its waters were high, put his trust in the almighty power of God. Kowing that God would not allow such an obstacle to hinder his mission, he said to the river, addressing it as if it were a servant, "Be still! The Master of all commands that I cross you and save the condemned man whom I am hurrying to reach."

When the saint spoke these words, at once the river stopped its flow and created a dry path for the holy man and those who were with him. Among his companions, one ran ahead of the saint to the judge to announce the arrival of the holy hierarch and the miracle which had occurred on the way. When the judge heard of this, he recognized it as the will of God whose judgements are just, and admitted that he had truly condemned an innocent man, for this miracle would not have happened if the man had been guilty as accused. He then immediately set the imprisoned man free and delivered him to the saint, unharmed and in good health.

The Sinful Woman Repents

As we have seen in the miracle worked through Saint Spiridon for the poor man in need of wheat, the holy bishop had the gift of foresight, knowing beforehand of things which would take place. Sins which people hid and refused to confess were also revealed to Saint Spiridon by God.

One time on a journey, while he was resting at the home of one who welcomed travellers, a woman came into the house. She had secretly been living a most sinful life, enslaved by passions, and had repeatedly committed adultery. This same woman, seeing the bishop, shamelessly approached him with a basin of water to wash his feet. Although he had never seen nor heard of her, he was aware of her sins and said, "Woman, do not touch me."

She begged him not to be repulsed by her, but, in her stubbornness, did not confess her sin. Surely, she had had numerous opportunities to confess and amend her ways, but had refused to do so; yet how great is the mercy of God who does not desire the death of a sinner! She, who had not sought the mercy of the Church, was, through God's will, now found in the presence of a gentle, yet firm and uncompromising, spiritual father. Since it is only through acknowledging and confessing one's sins that God grants remission, the saintly bishop, in his care for her soul, wanted her to admit her lustful actions and thoughts.

He said to her, "I am a disciple of the Lord who ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners."

At those words, she tried even more to approach and touch his feet to wash them. Spiridon sighed deeply for her soul which was on the brink of perdition, and in his gentleness and love for man, he openly reproached her. Like the Lord speaking to the Samaratin woman, the bishop spoke clearly of all her sins and urged her to repent. She was both amazed and afraid, for she could see that her hidden actions and thoughts were visible to the eyes of foresight which the holy servant of God possessed. Overcome with shame, and her heart finally humbled,

she fell at the bishop's feet, washing them, not with water, but with tears as she confessed her deeds aloud.

The parallel of this incident with that of the Gospel account from Saint John is striking. Through the laying on of hands of apostolic succession, the power which the Lord had bestowed upon the apostles to forgive sins had also been granted to this holy bishop.

He then addressed the woman with the same words of mercy which the Lord showed in the Gospel, "Courage, daughter, your sins are forgiven;" and added, "You are now healed, sin no more."

From that hour the woman corrected her way of life and was an example to others.

A stichera sung during the service to the saint on December 12 briefly and accurately sums up the incident: "He openly revealed the passionate thoughts of the sinful woman who dared to approach him, and he led her to confess her sin."

The Council of Nicaea

For the better part of the more than three hundred years since the birth of the Church at Pentecost, persecutions had been inflicted upon it by the Roman state. With the coming of Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313 a.d. the civil persecutions were brought to a close, at least for a time. Yet, during those persecutions, when the Church had been abundantly watered by the blood of martyrs and confessors, instead of waning and fading into history, the small seed of Christianity had grown and spread throughout the entire Roman empire. Not all those who were called before the civil authorities were put to death for their steadfastness in the faith; many were maimed, tortured and mutilated, then set free. These individuals are known in the Church as 'Confessors.'

Saint Spiridon, like so many other bishops, had also been subjected to such tortures and mutilation. One account states that one eye was cut out and the calf of his left leg severred. Again, Eusebius' *History of the Church* affirms that such was, indeed, the practice for a time under Diocletian when 'tired of killing, satiated...with bloodshed, they (i.e. the emperors) turned to what seemed to them kindness and humanity...It was not in good taste, they said, to pollute the city with

the blood of people of their own race...Orders were then issue that eyes should be gouged out and one leg maimed.'

Not content with merely persecuting the young Church from the outside, the devil also fought then, as now, against the Faith from within. Heresies had arisen in the Church from its earliest days. Many of the false teachings faded away quickly, others were rooted out in time. But, with the coming of Constantine and peace decending on the Church from without, a cancerous heresy threatened it from among its ranks, -- Arianism, which proclaimed that "there was a time when the Son was not," thereby making Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unequal to the Father. This was the most serious of the heresies which had arisen in the Church up to that time. Its adherents were numerous and threatened to completely split the Church. It was the discord aroused by Arianism which led to the gathering of the First Ecumenical Council.

Of all the local and "great" councils which defined the Faith, the council held in Nicaea in 325, summoned by Constantine the Great, is probably the best known. It was the first to be held under conditions of political freedom for the Church. It must also have been the most impressive, for this gathering of bishops and leaders of the Church was a visible witness of the sufferings which the Church had endured under persecution. How many of the fathers, like Saint Spiridon, arrived at Nicaea maimed, bearing the wounds and fresh scars of tortures endured for the Name of Christ!

The Council was summoned by Constantine, calling bishops from throughout all Christendom to the city of Nicaea principally to settle the matter of this Arian controversy. It is told that, journeying to the Council in Nicaea, the following happened to Saint Spiridon:

The bishop's fame had spread far beyond the small island of Cyprus, and those who sided with Arius were looking for a way to keep him from attending the Council. Even though the bishop was relatively unlearned in the formal sense of the word, the miracles worked through him were well known and the Arians feared that his deeds would influence the decisions of the more educated fathers.

When Spiridon paused in his journey to rest for the night at an inn, the Arians came under cover of darkness and decapitated both of the horses who were to pull his carriage. When dawn came and Spiridon's

companions saw what the heretics had done, a servant ran to tell the bishop. Saint Spiridon put his hope in the Lord and told the servant to go back and put the horses' heads back on their bodies. The servant went quickly and did what he had been told, but in his haste, he placed the head of the white horse on the body of the black horse, and the head of the black horse on the body of the white horse. At once, the horses came to life and rose to their feet. The saint gave thanks to God, got into his carriage and continued on his way to the council. All the people who saw this were amazed, for the black horse had a white head, and the white horse had a black head! Best of all, the wicked scheme of the heretics failed and the saint arrived at the Council where he proved to be a great defender and teacher of the faith.

As the Council convened, the Orthodox fathers urged Arius to confess that the Son of God is of one essence with God the Father. Those who supported Arius included several very important bishops, among whom were Eusebius of Nicomedia (not to be confused with the above mentioned Eusebius, who was bishop of Caesarea), Marius of Calcedon and Theognius of Nicaea. These men accepted the foolishness of Arius, blaspheming that the Son of God is a created being.

Those who fought for the true faith included Alexander, who is numbered among the saints in the Church, but who, in 325, was still a priest and had been sent to Nicaea as a representive of Saint Metrophan, Patriarch of Constantinople, who could not be present due to illness; as well as Saint Athanasius who was then serving as a deacon in the Church of Alexandria. Athanasius' theology and defense of the faith were sound, as were the statements made by Alexander, but because of the fact that these men were not bishops, their wisdom in the faith was a source of particular shame to the Arians.

The grace which worked in Saint Spiridon proved to be more powerful in clarifying matters than all the rhetorical knowledge which the others possessed. At the invitation of emperor Constantine, there were a number of Hellenic philosophers who were called "perinatitiki" present at the Nicaean Council Among these philosophers was one who was very wise and adept, and, a supporter of Arius. His sophisticated rhetoric was like a two edged sword which cuts deeply. He boldly attempted to destroy the teaching of the Orthodox.

The blessed Spiridon requested an opportunity to address that

particular philosopher. Because this bishop was a simple man who knew only Christ, and Him crucified, the holy fathers were hesitant to let him speak. They knew that he had no knowledge of Hellenistic learning and were afraid to allow him to match verbal skills with such philosophers. But Spiridon, knowing the strength and power which is from above, and how feeble human knowledge is in comparison to that might, approached the philosopher, saying to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ, listen to me and hear what I have to say to you."

The philosopher, looking at this country bishop, felt somewhat amused. Quite assured that his own rhetorical talents would make the simple cleric look like a fool, he proudly replied, "Go ahead, I am listening."

The saint began, "God, who created heaven and earth, is One. He fashioned man from the earth and created everything that exists, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. That Word, we affirm, is the Son of God, the true God, who showed mercy on us who had gone astray. He was born of the Virgin, lived among men, suffered the passion, died for our salvation and arose from the dead, raising the human race together with Himself. We await His coming again to judge all with righteousness and to reward each one according to his faith. We believe that He is consubstantial with the Father, dwelling together with Him and equally honored. We believe all these things without having to examine how they came to be; nor should you be so brazen as to question them, for these matters exceed the comprehension of man and far surpass all knowledge."

Silent for a moment, the bishop then continued, "Can't you now realize how true all of this is, O philosopher? Consider this simple and humble example: We are created and mortal beings and are not worthy to resemble the One who is divine in being and ineffable. Since we tend to believe more readily through what the eyes perceive than through what we merely hear with our ears, I want to prove something to you using this brick. It is composed of three elements which combine to make it one single being and nature."

Saying this, Saint Spiridon made the sign of the holy Cross with his right hand while holding a brick in his left hand, and he said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," while squeezing the brick. At once, flames rose into the air, water poured

down upon the ground and clay alone remained in his hand!

Those who were eyewitnesses to this miracle were filled with fear, especially the philosopher. He remained speechless, like one who had been mute from birth, and found no words to respond to the saint in whom Divine power had been manifested, according to what is written: "The kingdom of God is not in words, but in power." *(1 Cor. 4:20)*

Finally, humbled and convinced, the philosopher spoke, "I believe what you have told us."

Saint Spiridon said to him, "Then come and receive the sign of holy faith."

The philosopher turned to his colleagues and his students who were present and said, "Listen! As long as someone questioned me verbally, I was able to refute their statements with rhetorical skills. But my words fail against this elder who, instead of using mere words, has worked through power and miracles. My rhetoric is futile against such a might, for man cannot oppose God. If any of you feel as I do, let him then believe in Jesus Christ and follow this elder together with me. God Himself has spoken through him."

Then the philosopher accepted the Christian faith, rejoicing that the saint had overcome his own logic. All the faithful were glad, and the Arian heretics were at a loss.

It was Saint Spiridon's vital participation in the Council of Nicaea which led the God-inspired Church hymnographers to compose words such as these for his service:

> "Your words adorned the Church of Christ, and in your deeds you offered glory to the Image of God, blessed Spiridon."

Saint Spiridon, like all the saints, was not seeking his own glory; he was willing to sacrifice everything, even hs very life, for God.

Saint Spiridon Commands His Dead Daughter to Speak

When the Council at Nicaea ended with Arianism condemned, each of the fathers returned to his home to bring the results of the proceedings of the Council to their flocks and to resume their roles in shepherding the flock of Christ. During the time he had been away at

Nicaea, Saint Spiridon's daughter, Irene, had died. She had never married and was still in the beauty of youth when God called her to the heavenly bridal chamber.

When the bishop arrived home a certain woman approached him, weeping. She told him that she had entrusted Irene with the only thing of value which she owned -- a golden vessel -- asking the young woman to put it away somewhere secure for her. Irene had accepted the item and hidden it, but died suddenly before she could tell the woman where her property could be found. Now the woman appealed to Saint Spiridon to search through his house for the golden vessel. He looked everywhere, but in vain. He felt sorry for the woman, for she was poor and in need of the one thing of value which she owned. Together with those from his house, he went to his daughter's tomb and called out to the dead one as if she were still alive:

"My child, Irene, where is the gold which was given to you for safekeeping?"

Irene's voice was heard, responding as if she had just awakened from a sound sleep, "Father, I hid it in such and such a place in the house."

Again, the saint addressed her, "Sleep now, my child, until the Lord of all wakens you to the life eternal."

Everyone present heard the voice of the dead woman clearly and were filled with awe at this miracle. The saint returned to his house, found the gold in the very place where his daughter had said she had hidden it, and gave it to the woman.

Like any father, Saint Spiridon had been saddened by the death of his child, but as one who loves God, he accepted her earthly departure as the will of the Lord. It was his love and compassion for the poor woman alone which made him call upon his daughter to answer him from the other side of the grave.

It is also interesting to note that there is no mention in this account of Spiridon's wife. Thus, if she had still been living at the time of his elevation to the episcopacy, she had, most likely, already been taken to the Lord by the time of the Council of Nicaea; for, had she still been alive, the woman mentioned in the above account would surely have entrusted her valuable belonging to the wife of the bishop, not to a young daughter.

Saint Spiridon Heals the Emperor

After the death of Constantine the Great in 337, the empire was divided among his sons. The eastern part of the empire fell to the middle son, Constantius.

At one point, while he was in Antioch, Syria, emperor Constantius became gravely ill. Doctors were summoned, but none could cure him. The suffering king turned to God and fervently prayed that he be cured of the disease from which he suffered.

One night he had a dream. An angel was leading a group of bishops toward him. The angel pointed out two of the bishops who appeared to be advisors of the others, and he told Constantius that these two could heal his disease. Upon awakening, the king thought of what he had dreamt, but he did not know the identity of either one of the bishops whom he had seen in his dream. How, after all, could he identify someone he had never seen, especially when he did not even know their names or homelands? In fact, one of those whom he had seen in the dream was not yet a bishop, although he would be consecrated soon.

Constantius was confused by this dream for quite some time; then, under counsel, he called a gathering of bishops from all the area surrounding Antioch and searched among them for the two whom he had seen in his dream, but in vain. Again, Constantius summoned bishops, this time from more distant regions, but he still did not find the two whom the angel had revealed to him. Finally, he sent out an order that all the bishops from throughout his empire were to come to Antioch.

This royal edict reached the island of Cyprus and was brought to Tremithus where Spiridon was bishop. It was not a surprise to the holy man that he was called to Antioch; God had revealed to him all which had taken place regarding the emperor's disease and the dream which he had had. Thus, Spiridon left for Antioch, taking Triphilius, who was not yet consecrated a bishop, with him.

They reached the city and went straight to the royal palace. It had been a long journey and they were both tired. Saint Spiridon was dressed in simple clothes, carrying a fig bough as a staff, and he also bore a small clay stick on his chest, as was the custom of those living in Jerusalem as a symbol of the holy wood of the cross. Certainly, his appearance was not that of a bishop. He and Triphilius arrived at the

palace unannounced and without any pomp or entourage. As they approached the entrance, one of the servants, looking at his simple garb and humble appearance, took Saint Spiridon for a beggar; he laughed and made fun of him, refusing him entrance, and then even slapped the bishop on the cheek. Then Spiridon, who had silently submitted to all this humiliating treatment, obeyed the Lord's command and turned the other cheek to the servant. The man, himself a Christian, at once realized that this was no beggar, but a fellow Christian and, indeed, a bishop, whose unkept appearance was due to exhaustion after a long and arduous journey. He was ashamed of his arrogant behavior and humbled himself before Spiridon, asking for forgiveness, which the saint at once granted.

Bishop Spiridon was then brought before the emperor. When Constantius saw him and Triphilius, he realized that these were the men whom the angel had pointed out to him in his dream. He did not wait for Spiridon to come to him, but arose from his chair and approached the holy bishop, falling before the servant of God and begging him with tears to pray to God that he be healed of the illness which threatened his very life. Constantius' faith, his humility before the humble bishop who was a true servant of the eternal King, and his trust in God's mercy were rewarded. Saint Spiridon touched the emperor's head and the Grace of God, which moves and works through those who serve Him, healed Constantius.

The cure was immediate and complete. We can but imagine the relief which the emperor must have felt, as well as his respect and reverence for this simple bishop from Tremithus. All the wealth and power of the empire, his access to the best of physicians, had been futile in attempts to grant him health. Having suffered for so long and lost all confidence in the medical knowledge of the most adept physicians of that time and place, he had humbled himself and put his trust in God. Constantius recognized the sanctity of Saint Spiridon and insisted that he remain with him for the rest of the day. In celebration of his restored health, a banquet was offered and Constantius let everyone know that God had healed him of his disease, through the prayers of Saint Spiridon.

Triphilius, meanwhile, was in awe at all the royal glory: the beauty of the palace, the pomp surrounding the emperor, the objects which

were gilded in gold, and the elegant clothes which even the servants wore. Certainly, he had not been accustomed to anything like this among the villages and peasants of Tremithus!

But Spiridon, as a loving spiritual father, said to him, "Don't be so impressed, brother. Do you think that royal elegance and glory make the emperor more righteous than others? He will die, just like any poor man, and will be laid in a grave; he will also stand before the righteous Judge. You should not regard one who is mortal, as if he were immortal. You are impressed by something which is temporal; instead, you should be seeking that which is immaterial and eternal and should love heavenly glory alone which is without end."

Then Bishop Spiridon turned to the emperor; his body had been healed, but there was also a need for treatment to be given to his soul. The saint instructed Constantius at length to turn his thoughts more toward God who always shows His good will for mankind. He encouraged the emperor to strive for these same virtues: to be kind to those under his authority, merciful to those who err, a ready mediator to those seeking his aid, generous to all who appeal to him for help, a father to all, gracious and condescending to everyone.

The emperor listened to Spiridon's words and heard that if someone does not govern according to the manner which the saint described, he will more readily be known as a tyrant and not a king. Finally, Spiridon taught him to be firm and correct in matters of the faith and to refuse anything which would be harmful or contrary to the Church of God. In these instructions too, perhaps, we see an example of Spiridon's gift of foresight.

The name of Constantius, son of Constantine the Great, is most often associated with the those sympathetic to the Arians. It is true that, years later, after Constantine II and Constans were destroyed, and Constantius was sole ruler of the entire empire, he allowed himself to be swayed and sided with those who supported Arius. He would forget the words addressed to him by the humble bishop whom God had sent to bring about his cure. Unlike his father, he would prove to be weak and ignorant in matters of the faith, easily influenced politically, an opportunist, and would grossly exagerrate his position in the Church. However, at the time of the above incident, he shared the rule of the empire with his two brothers and had not yet given himself over

to siding with the Arians who continued, in spite of the decisions of Nicaea, to spread their heresy.

Constantius was truly grateful for all which Spiridon had done for him and wanted to show his thanks in the way which was, and often still is, customary among those who still think in earthly ways: he offered the bishop a large amount of money.

Spiridon certainly was about to accept payment for the miracle which God had worked through him. He refused the emperor saying, "It is not right to repay an act of love in such a manner. What was done for you through me was love. I left my home, travelled a long distance by sea, endured cold weather and heavy winds -- isn't this love? Can this be compensated in gold which is more the source of all evil and leads to the loss of all justice?"

Still, the emperor also wanted to make an offering in his gratitude and kept insisting. Finally, the saint accepted the money, but on the condition that it be distributed at once to those in need. Constantius agreed, and it was only then that he allowed the priests, deacons and all the servants of the Church who had been present, to leave the palace. He had learned many valuable lessons from the holy and simple peasant bishop from Tremithus, among them was the fact that it is unfit for the servants of the immortal King to pay tax to a mortal emperor. Sadly, he would later push to the recesses of his memory the other Christian teachings which Spiridon had expounded.

The Pagan Woman's Child Raised to Life

Saint Spiridon left the emperor's palace. There was no need for him to remain in Antioch. He had a flock of faithful at home who were in need of his care, so the long journey by land and sea back to Cyprus began. Along the way he was welcomed into the home of a Christian who had a deep love for Jesus Christ. While he was there a pagan woman came in. This woman did not know the Greek language, but she approached the saint, carrying the lifeless body of her son who had just died. She laid the boy at Saint Spiridon's feet, weeping unconsolably. No one present understood the language which the woman spoke, but there was no need for words - her tears spoke clearly she was imploring the saint to grant life to her son.

Saint Spiridon's reputation for holiness and the miracles worked through him were well known by that time. When he had paused on his journey and gone into that particular house, many of the faithful gathered to see the bishop and receive his blessing. There were a number of people present in the house when the woman came in. Because of this, Spiridon at first did not want to give in to the woman's request, for he saw this as a situation which might lead to vain-glory. But the woman's grief touched his compassion, and finally he asked the deacon accompanying him, "Artemithos, What should we do?"

The deacon answered, "Why are you asking me, Father? What else can you do but call upon Christ, the Giver of life, who has so often answered your prayers. You healed the emperor, how can you ignore the poor?"

The bishop was moved by the deacon's compassion for the woman. He wept and prayed fervently to the Lord. The same God, who, through Elisha and Elijah, gave life both to the son of the woman of Sareftha and the son of the Shunnamite woman, now heard Saint Spiridon's prayer. The spirit of life returned back to the dead body of the child. He awoke as if from sleep and began to cry.

At this, the child's mother was so overcome with emotion that the shock proved too great for her: she died, for it is not only sorrow and grief which can kill a person, but there are also times when immeasurable joy and relief can do the same. This was exactly what happened to the distraught mother when she saw her dead child brought back to life.

Again, the saint asked the deacon, "What should we do?" and he again answered the bishop as before. Once more, Spiridon turned to prayer, raising his eyes to heaven and lifting his mind to God who breathes life into the dead and whose will alone created all things.

He then turned to the woman who lay dead on the floor and said, "Arise and stand up."

The woman opened her eyes, rose to her feet and picked up her crying child. Then the saint spoke to the woman and all who were present, telling them firmly not to relate what had taken place to anyone. Those who had witnessed these things did indeed keep their silence, respecting the bishop's wishes; it was not until after Spiridon's repose that deacon Artemithos spoke of the miracle which he had witnessed, for

he was unable to keep silent about the glory and might of God which had worked through His beloved servant Spiridon.

People are sometimes skeptical when they hear of miracles which are worked through the saints. There is probably no other miracle which arouses skepticism more than that of the dead being returned to life through the prayers of a saint. Some will hasten to say that the individual probably was not really dead. Even if that were the case, how does one then explain that the signs of life return only after the saint prays, touches and/or commands?

The wisdom of the Church, speaking through the hymnography of the divine services, recognizes the hesitancy and weakness of mortals to believe some miracles. The tropars and stichera for the saints are prayers which honor, glorify and beseech those who are pleasing to God, but they often serve a catechetical purpose for us. In the service for Saint Spiridon on December 12, we find the following words in one of the stichera from Great Vespers which aptly describe the deeds of Saint Spiridon as well as our response to these actions: "...your miracles surpass our comprehension..."

Indeed, God gave us a reasoning mind and intelligence, but there are times when He asks us to believe on the basis of faith, and not on the basis of tangible proofs or rationale, for our comprehension is limited, while the actions of God are boundless. His rule is over all creation, for all are the works of His hands.

The Goat That Would Not Be Stolen

Saint Spiridon, on being elevated to the office of a bishop, never abandoned his humble beginnings as a shepherd, nor his love for animals. Following the example of Saint Paul the Apostle, he strove to provide for his own needs through his labors. A shepherd in his youth, he continued to keep a flock of sheep and goats even after ascending the hierarchal throne.

A farmer once came to him to buy one hundred goats from his flock. The saint told him to lay out the agreed price and they would then go and take the number of goats he had paid for. The farmer silently counted out enough money for only ninety-nine goats, hiding the fact that he was not paying for one. Saint Spiridon trusted the farmer's honesty and did not feel that he, too, should count the money. It was known to

all that he never checked the amount of payment given for such a transaction, so the farmer assumed that the deed would go unnoticed. After the farmer had set the payment on the table, he and the bishop went off together to the barn to complete the sale.

The saint told the farmer to take the goats which he had paid for. The farmer separated one hundred goats from the herd and led them out of the pasture area; but one of the goats, like a good servant realizing that a wrong had been done to its master and that his price had not been paid, turned around quickly and ran back into the barn. The farmer caught him and again led him out; again the goat broke loose and went back to the barn. This happened two or three more times, the goat struggling and breaking loose from the farmer and fleeing back to the barn. Finally, the farmer picked him up, placed him on his shoulders and began to walk off, but this time the goat fought furiously, butting the man's head with its horns, finally throwing itself to the ground and pulled strongly against the rope which had been tied around it. By that time, some people had gathered to watch the spectacle. Everyone was amazed at the stubbornness which the goat displayed.

Saint Spiridon realized what was going on, but did not want to reprimand the farmer in front of everyone, so he said gently, "See, my son, the animal is not carrying on for no reason, refusing to be taken to your house. Didn't you hold back the price of one goat? That is why he keeps breaking away from you and runs back to the barn."

The farmer was truly ashamed that his conniving had come to light, he admitted what he had done and asked for forgiveness. Then he paid the price and again took hold of the goat; this time the animal gently went along of its own free will and, in fact, hurried to its new home ahead of its new master.

The above occurance is amusing, especially to our modern way of thinking and life. Certainly, goats are known for being obstinate; was this animal behaving according to its own stubborn nature, or was it truly refusing to allow a deceitful action against its master? We know that, before the fall of man, while Adam was still in Paradise, all the beasts obeyed him and submitted to his will. Spiridon's simplicity as well as his humility and submissiveness to the will of God took him back to that former blessedness so that even the irrational creatures would submit to him.

The Proud Deacon

There was a village named Erithras on the island of Cyprus. This village was not far from the Metropolia of Constandius. Saint Spiridon went there one time to see to some affairs and, while there, went into the church. It was the season of the harvest, the weather was extremely hot and the bishop was very tired from the journey. During the service which was taking place, he told one of the serving deacons to abbreviate one of the prayers. The deacon not only ignored what he had been told to do, but instead he prolonged the prayer, chanting and singing with pride, full of vain glory because he knew he had a good voice.

Saint Spiridon is known for being kind and gentle when dealing with people, but disobedience and pride in oneself were simply not to be tolerated. The bishop became very angry with the deacon and reprimanded him for his disobedience, saying sternly, "Be quiet!"

At once, the deacon had no voice; not only could he not sing melodiously as before, but he was as mute as if he had no tongue. Everyone in the church was struck by this deed, and word of what had happened spread immediately throughout the village. Everyone came into the church to see what had happened.

The deacon fell at the saint's feet in silence, begging him to loosen his tongue. Others, both friends and relatives of the deacon, also interceded before Spiridon on his behalf. Finally, Spiridon was moved to pity, and forgave the proud cleric. The Lord who gave the Apostles the power to 'bind' also bestowed on them the power to 'loose.' The saint absolved the deacon, allowng the power of speech to return to him, but he left a sign of reproach on him because of his disobedience and pride: even though the deacon could speak, he no longer had a strong voice; instead, he stuttered, falling over his speech, and the source of his pride, his singing voice, no longer existed.

The Heavenly Choir and the Gift of Oil

Another time, the bishop went to church in his town for Vespers. It happened that there were no people in the church, only the clergy who were serving. Saint Spiridon told them to light all the candles and

lampadas, while he stood before the altar praying. When the time came for him, as bishop, to turn and say, "Peace be with you all," there was no one in church to give the proper response; but from the heights of the empty church came the sound of a great many voices, calling, "And to your spirit."

The sound of the voices was sweet, surpassing any melodic song of man. The deacon who was saying the litany was motionless with fear, for he heard the same divine voices responding "Lord, have mercy," to each of the petitions.

These voices were heard not only inside the church, but even outside. Everyone who heard hurried to the church to listen to the beautiful music. Many drew near the door of the church and heard singing, the likes of which they had never before even imagined. As they opened the door and went inside, they saw no one except the bishop and a few clergy. After the people were inside, the heavenly voices were no longer heard, for now it was the role of the faithful to sing responses in honor and petition to God.

Another time the saint was standing in church during Vespers and there was not enough oil for the lampada. The bishop could see that the flame was about to extinguish. He was upset by this, for that was the only light in the church; without it the church would be dark and the hymns for Vespers would have to cease without the service being completed.

But God, who fulfills the desires of those who fear him, poured oil into the lampada, just as He once filled the widow's jar during the days of Elisha.

The clergy who were serving brought out jars and placed them under the lampada to be filled with the oil which overflowed from the lamp. They filled the jars with the blessed oil which flowed as a true gift from God.

The Sailor's Wife

A sailor who lived in the city of Tremithus was out to sea for twelve months, transporting a shipment. During the time he was away, his wife committed adultery with another man and conceived a child. When the sailor returned home, he found his wife pregnant and knew

that she had sinned with someone else. Filled with rage, he struck her; then, not wishing to live with her any longer, he sent her out of his house. After that, he went to Bishop Spiridon, telling him what had happened and seeking the bishop's advise.

The saint was upset, both at the sin which the woman had committed as well as her husband's revulsion. He sent someone to call the woman to him so he could speak with her. When he saw her he did not have to ask if it was true that she had committed adultery -- anyone could see that she was with child.

Bishop Spiridon said to her, "why did you take another man in place of your husband and bring such shame on your house?"

Now the woman added another sin to the one already committed: she lied, saying that she had not been with another man, but that the child in her womb was fathered by her own husband!

When the bishop heard this he became truly angry. Forgiveness and compassion are always at hand for those who recognize and repent for whatever sin they commit, but one cannot be absolved of a sin without first acknowledging it. Instead of finding the woman repentant and seeking the reconcilation which the Church has to offer, the bishop saw her obstinate and obviously lying. When Spiridon heard her stubborn denial, he was upset more by her refusal to confess than for the very sin of adultery which she had committed.

"Your husband was gone for twelve months," the bishop said, "how can you say that he is the father of the child which you have conceived? Who ever heard of a child remaining in the womb of its mother for twelve months or more?"

Still, the woman remained obstinate, saying that the child in her womb was waiting for its father to return from sea before being born. She added even more lies to this, trying to convince everyone of her foolish explanation. When she saw that no one believed her, she began yelling and behaving completely irrational, as if she had been unjustly accused.

The gentle bishop Spiridon tried still to lead her to repentance, saying, "Woman, you have fallen into sin and it is necessary for you now to repent sincerely so that you may have a hope of salvation, for there is no sin which overcomes the great mercy of God. Don't you see that through the sin of physical passion you have given birth to despair and

through despair has come shamelessness? You are suffering now from these sins, but you still have time to repent. The child in your body will not be born until you confess the truth without resorting to lies -- lies which even a blind man can see through."

The woman left the bishop's presence, still holding to her story that the father of her unborn child was her husband and no other.

But the words spoken by the saintly bishop proved to be prophetic: when the time for the birth drew near, the woman was in indescribable pain, yet the child would not leave the womb. Even then, her heart remained hardened and she stubbornly refused to confess her sin. In this terrible state of denial and pain, she died, not being able to give birth.

News of the woman's death was brought to Bishop Spiridon. He wept and repented for the way in which he had been angered and judged her, and he said, "I refuse to judge anyone ever again if the words which I speak become fact so quickly."

The Conversion of the Pagan

Having recounted the events of one who refused to listen to the words of Bishop Spiridon, we will now relate what happened to someone who did take his words to heart and obeyed them.

There was a faithful and God-loving woman named Sophronia in the bishop's diocese. In all ways, she led a truly Christian life, but there was one circumstance in her life which disturbed her peace of soul -- her husband was an unbeliever, worse yet, he followed pagan beliefs and rituals. The woman, in complete trust and faith, went to Bishop Spiridon. She explained her situation and begged the gentle bishop to help her bring her husband to the true faith.

Her husband had a friend who lived very close to the bishop's residence and who revered and respected Spiridon a great deal. They often visited each other's homes, quite a normal thing for friends to do. On one such occasion when a number of the neighbors were gathered together and enjoying a meal together, both Saint Spiridon and the unbelieving man were present.

Spiridon turned and spoke to one who was serving the meal, saying, "There is someone outside near the barn. He has come with a message

for me from the shepherds who are watching my flock. He will say that, while the shepherds were asleep, the animals scattered and were lost in the mountains. Go and tell him that that the shepherd who sent him here has found all the sheep in a cave; not one animal is lost from the flock."

The servant assisting at the table went and found the messenger exactly where the bishop had said he would be. He told him what Spiridon had said and sent him off. After an hour of more had passed, while all the guests were still at table and the first messenger had not yet had time to arrive back at the sheepfold, a second man, also sent by the same shepherd, arrived. He said that the entire flock had been found.

When the unbelieving man heard this, he was amazed at the fact that Saint Spiridon had foreseen all these things, knowing what was in the future as if it were the present. He could not understand that the pure in heart often see things in the spirit, as it is revealed to them by God. He began to regard Spiridon as a god and wanted to honor him as such, the same way the Lyconians once wanted to worship Barnabas and Paul, offering wreaths and animal sacrifices.

The gentle bishop spoke to him, "I am not a god, but the servant of the one true God, and a sinner like you. The fact that I know things which are in the future is something which has been given me by the Lord. If you would begin to believe in Him, you also will know how great is the rule and power of the Almighty."

Then Sophronia, seeing that her husband was ready to listen, took the opportunity to speak to him at length. Having seen the gentleness, humility, love and true presence of Christ in the bishop, the man abandoned paganism and believed in the one true God. He accepted baptism, and from that moment on lived a true Christian life.

Thieves at Night

With all the duties that the office of the hierarchy holds, Spiridon, as we have seen, still kept a flock of animals, mostly sheep and goats. His diocese was poor, and the income from his flock served as a means of support for the humble bishop. Often, when the problems of administration and the weight of the spiritual care of his reason-endowed

flock of faithful were heavy upon the bishop's shoulders, he found solace in the simple occupation of feeding and caring for the silent animals, as he had in his youth. These times reminded him of the care-free, peaceful and pleasant days of his childhood when he was a shepherd. Although he often entrusted the animals to other shepherds when his duties called him away, when he was home he continued to look after the flock himself.

On night thieves came into his sheepfold to steal several of the animals. They snuck in unobserved, separated a number of sheep from the others and were about to run off under the cover of night, proud of the fact that no one had seen them. No one, that is, but God who watches over all, even as they sleep.

God's love for mankind far surpasses our imagination. The Church often refers to various saints as "friend of God;" and just as any friend watches out for and comes to the help of another, so God also comes quickly to the help of those who love Him. When He saw the thieves about to run off with some of the animals from the poor bishop's flock, He stopped them. The thieves' hands and feet were held by invisible bonds so strongly that they were unable to move or leave the barn where they remained until morning.

When dawn came, the saint went to care for the sheep. There he found the thieves bound by the might of God, with their hands behind their backs and their feet fixed firmly. The bishop saw clearly what had happened. He remained calm, perhaps even slightly amused, at the plight of the would-be thieves; yet, above all, he was thankful to God, and also saw this as an occasion to instruct the criminals.

As a gentle and loving father Spiridon spoke to them about the sin which they had tried to commit, "Doesn't the commandment say that you must not covet what belongs to another? Each one of us has to eat from the honest work of his own hands."

This time, unlike the sailor's wife, the thieves admitted their sin and asked the bishop to forgive them. Not only did Saint Spiridon forgive them, but he even gave them a ram saying, "Take this so that your efforts and your all night vigil would not have been in vain."

Then, having prayed to almighty God, their bonds were loosed. They left the barn, and, from that time on, never took what did not belong to them.

The Deceitful Merchant

There was a merchant from Tremithus who had the practice of borrowing money from Saint Spiridon in order to purchase wares on his travels. After returning home, he would return what he had borrowed. Because the bishop paid little attention to money, he always told the merchant to put the money back into the box from which he had taken it himself. He never bothered to watch or control the merchant to see how much money he took from the box or how much he returned to it.

This practice continued for quite some time: the merchant, with the saint's blessing, took the money himself and, upon returning from his travels, put back what he had taken, unsupervised. As long as he acted honestly, his business prospered.

With the acquisition of money the sin of greed and avarice often follow. The merchant was finally blinded, like Judas, with love for money, and one time he did not return what he had taken. He kept the secret to himself and lied to the saint, saying that he had put back exactly what he had borrowed, as always. But shortly after this, his business failed: not only did the money borrowed from the bishop not earn him anything, but all his wares were lost in a fire that consumed everything he had.

The merchant, in poverty, again turned to Bishop Spiridon, asking him to loan him the resources so that he could again invest in some goods. The bishop told him to go into the room where the box of money was kept and take what he needed himself, saying, "Go and take what you need from what you put there last time."

The merchant went, but found no money at all. He faced the bishop empty-handed.

Spiridon said to him, "Brother, believe me when I say that no one else has put his hand into that box since the last time you were here. If you had returned the money, you would now be able to borrow from it."

The merchant was ashamed of what he had done and humbled himself before the saint, asking for forgiveness. Saint Spiridon at once forgave him and instructed him not to again covet what does not belong to him nor to darken his own conscience with wickedness and

lies, for these are the results of one who earns a living dishonestly and are not rewards but punishments.

The Pagan Idols Overturned

There was once a gathering of bishops in Alexandria, called there by the patriarch of that city, to join in prayer for a special intention: At that time paganism was still flourishing in Egypt and the surrounding land. Idols, carved and fashioned by human hands, were worshipped everywhere. The patriarch believed that the joint prayers of all the bishops would overturn the pagan idols, smashing them to pieces, and thus, the people would see the foolishness of their idolatry, and turn to the one true God.

The bishops poured out their most fervent prayers to God, and, indeed, all the idols within the city fell and were smashed, as well as those from areas around Alexandria -- all, with the exception of one single, but reknowned, idol which remained standing.

The gathering of hierarchs continued to pray that that idol would fall too, and that the people would realize the vanity of the objects which they worshipped and turn to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who trampled down death itself and whose power destroys the pagan gods which are the work of the devil. Still, that idol, the work of the devil, would not fall and the people felt that it was stronger than the triune God to whom the bishops prayed.

The patriarch was determined, and decided to remain in a vigil of prayer all night long. During that time, he had a vision in which he was told that he should not be completely disheartened that the idol was not smashed; instead he was to send someone quickly to Cyprus and call Spiridon, the bishop of Tremithus, for that idol was left standing for him, and him alone, to overthrow by his prayers.

The patriarch immediately wrote to the blessed Spiridon and asked him to come to Alexandria, telling him about the idol and the need for him to come in order for the populace to realize that God alone is the God of all. When Saint Spiridon received the plea from the patriarch, he then set out for Alexandria the next morning by ship. When his boat reached the reknowned harbor of Alexandria, which is called Neapolis, and the saint disembarked from the ship, immediately the lone remaining idol in Alexandria fell and shattered, together with the numerous sacrifices which had been offered to it. There were many people praying before the idol when it suddenly fell and broke to pieces; they went to the patriarch to tell him what had happened. The leader of the Alexandrian Church immediately realized the cause and said to the other bishops, "My brothers, Spiridon of Tremithus has arrived in Alexandria."

The patriarch then took his staff in hand and he, together with the other bishops, went to meet Saint Spiridon at the harbor. They welcomed him with honors, and everyone celebrated that day both because of the presence of the holy bishop who worked such wonders and for the fact that the last of the pagan idols in Alexandria and the surrounding territories no longer existed.

Saint Spiridon and Holy Scripture

The great historians of the Church, Nicephorus and Sozomen, say that the holy father Spiridon was very firm in adherence to all the rules of the Church, and, in particular, that he would not allow even one word which was written in the Holy Scripture to be changed. We must remember that the Bible was then read in the original Greek and there was no question of what word or nuance best suited a translation.

Once the following incident took place: There was a gathering of bishops in Cyprus to see to some of the matters which had arisen in the Church. Among those gathered were both Saint Spiridon and the younger Bishop Triphilius, a former disciple of Spiridon's. Triphilius was especially adept at understanding the holy books for he had studied extensively in his youth and was learned in Scripture. His wisdom and knowledge were respected by his fellow bishops who asked him to preach to the congregation in church one day.

As Triphilius was speaking, he mentioned the words which Christ had spoken to the paralytic, recorded in the Gospel of Saint Mark, "rise and take up your bed." But Triphilius did not use the word 'bed,' instead he said 'mat'.

When Saint Spiridon heard this, he was unable to keep silent, for he could not bear hearing anyone change the words which had been spoken by the Savior. He rose from his place in the church and

addressed Triphilius in front of everyone,"Do you think you are better than He who said 'bed'? Are you ashamed to use the same word which our Lord spoke?"

Spiridon was so disturbed that a single word spoken by Christ had been changed that he could no longer even remain in the church. Having said these words to Triphilius, he left the building.

This incident should not be seen be seen as an offence. Triphilius had not only been a disciple of Saint Spiridon, but he was also very puffed up with pride at his rhetorical gifts. The saint's words served to teach him some humility, without which all his wisdom and knowledge would be useless in the Church. Spiridon was also held in high regard by all the clergy and faithful in the Church for he was both older in years, weaker in body and was known for the fact that the works of God were often manifest through him.

The Saint's Life Draws Near Its End

While Constantius was still ruling, in the year 347, Spiridon's labors upon this earth were drawing to a close. He had seen times of Christian persecution and times of peace for the young Church which he served.

Although advanced in years, he continued to assist with work in the fields, especially during the harvest season. It happened that as he was working in the field one day during the time when the sun was strong and the air dry, the saint's head suddenly was covered with dew. He had been laboring as though it was his final hour when the dew softly fell upon his head the same way it had fallen on the fleece of Ghideon long ago. Many were present and witnessed what had happened. None could say that what appeared was mere perspiration, it was clearly dew which had fallen from above.

Suddenly his hair changed: some became white, some turned black, some blond. God alone knows why this happened or what it could have meant. The saint put his hand to his head, then said to those who were there that the time for his departure was near. He spoke to his fellow laborers and spiritual children at length, as a final instruction, exhorting them especially to love God and neighbor.

After a few days had passed, while he was at prayer, he gave himself

into the hands of God whom he had served justly and in holiness all the days of his life.

News of the saint's falling asleep spread quickly. He was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Tremithus. The gentle and loving leader of the Church did not abandon his faithful flock even after being taken to the Lord, but continued to work miracles after his death. Many people came to pray at his tomb, asking for his intercessions before the Lord. It was not long before the Church, guided by the will of the Holy Spirit, officially included Spiridon, bishop of Tremithus, in the official calendar of saints.

Saint Spiridon as an Intercessor before God

"Remember me in your prayers."

How frequently we say those words to each other! Indeed, one of the most outstanding features in any church service is how often we pray for others: the sick, the suffering, those in prison, travellers, clergy, laity, those in civil authority...the list goes on.

We sincerely trust in the prayers of others, especially those who lead a truly Christian life. We also know that 'death' is not an end, but a passing from this temporal life to eternal life.

In the Nicene Creed we confess our belief in "One, holy, Catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church." The Church is One. It is the body of Christ. Just as our Lord is not divided between those on earth and those in heaven, so the Church, His body, is not divided between those who have gone before us to eternal life and those still struggling along the path of salvation here on earth. We ask each other for prayers before the Lord, and so it is equally normal to ask those who stand before God in heaven to also intercede for us.

The Psalmist says "Wonderful is God in his saints." God, indeed, is surrounded by those who led holy lives here on earth. Just as He heard and accepted their prayers during their earthly lives, so He also accepts their prayers now, and answers them.

Saint Spiridon loved and prayed for his faithful during his life of ministry to them. His earthly departure did not put an end to his love for those who turn to him for help. We have related here several of the miracles performed through him during his life, but this blessed saint continues to pray for and assist us even now.

The body of Saint Spiridon has remained completely intact. The holy relics are to be found in the church in Kerkyra on the island of Corfu, Greece. Thousands of people come before his reliquary each year to pray for his intercessions and assistance. The miracles attributed to him are countless.

One sign of the saint's continuing care for the faithful is clear: often when the serving priests in the church open his reliquary, the body is gone. Later, when they open it again, they find he has returned. This is not a rare incident, but happens, even in our own time, repeatedly. Another indication of this miracle is that each year, on the day of his commemoration, December 12, the footwear on his body are completely worn out. The serving priests literally change the saint's shoes every year, only to find them worn out again the next year. It is often not unusual for the priests, on touching the saints feet as they change his shoes, to find the body pliable and warm, not hard and cold like that of a corpse.

The humble bishop who served the Lord unreservedly throughout his entire life, certainly would not want any of these "miracles" to be attributed to him, but would be the first to recognizing them as the action of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who receives from us glory, thanksgiving, honor and worship unto ages of ages.

Amen